

Constitution Day Teaching Resources

Federal law passed in 2004 requires that all schools that receive federal funding provide a course to all students on the Constitution on Constitution Day, September 17. The law is known as H.R. 4818, and the text is found at section 111(b):

Each educational institution that receives Federal funds for a fiscal year shall hold an educational program on the United States Constitution on September 17 of such year for the students served by the educational institution.

This law does not distinguish between elementary, secondary, or college-level institutions, so must be interpreted to apply to all levels. This page offers several suggestions for how the very broad subject of "The Constitution" can be taught for high-school level students. Teachers at other levels can use the suggestions as a basis for lesson plans for younger or older students. Also, the law does not specify what the "educational program" should consist of. This provides a lot of leeway in your presentation.

Social Studies/History Suggestion 1

Read and understand the Constitution

Read [the Constitution](#). Then, answer the following questions:

- What are the main topics of each of the seven Articles of the Constitution?
- What branches of government are created by the Constitution?
- Provide some examples of how each branch has power over another branch.
- How can Congress remove the President from office?
- List some of the powers that belong to the federal government only.
- What is the longest time a President elected today can stay in office?
- How long do members of the House of Representatives serve? Senators?
- How old do you have to be to be a Representative? A Senator? A federal judge?
- How old do you have to be to be a federal judge?
- How old do you have to be to be President? Vice President?
- Explain "habeas corpus."
- Explain what an ex post facto law is.
- Explain "bill of attainder."
- How many states had to ratify the Constitution to put it into effect?
- How many states have to ratify an amendment to make it part of the Constitution?¹

¹ <http://www.usconstitution.net/constteach.html#soc>

Social Studies/History Suggestion 2

Understand the events that lead to the creation of the Constitution

Read the [Articles of Confederation Topic Page](#) and the [Report of the Annapolis Conference](#). Then, answer the following questions:

- What is a confederation? Why might a confederation fail as a system of government?
 - Who was the first President of Congress?
 - Who was a champion for the changing of the type of government of the United States?
 - What were some of the defects of the Articles that the delegates to the Annapolis Conference listed?
 - Where did the Annapolis Conference delegates propose to meet, and when?
 - Who is Daniel Shays, and what did he do to influence the creation of the Constitution?
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Social Studies/History Suggestion 3

Understand the Constitutional Convention

Read the [Constitutional Convention Topic Page](#). Then, answer the following questions:

- Who is considered the Father of the Constitution? Why?
- Where was the Constitutional Convention held, and when?
- What state did not send delegates to the Convention?
- Who was the President of the Convention?
- Whose notes on the proceedings give us insight into the thoughts and debates behind the Constitution?
- Describe the differences between the Virginia Plan and the New Jersey Plan.
- Explain the Great Compromise.
- Explain both sides' concerns over slavery and representation in Congress.
- Why did the delegates leave out a bill of rights?
- Who expressed his feeling that the Constitution was imperfect, but was the best the Convention could come up with?
- What was the Committee of Style? ²

² <http://www.usconstitution.net/constteach.html#soc>

Social Studies/History Suggestion 4

Understand the Bill of Rights

Read the [Amendment 1](#) through [Amendment 9](#) and the [Bill of Rights Topic Page](#). Then, answer the following questions:

- Why was a bill of rights not included in the original Constitution?
 - Who was the champion of the Bill of Rights in Congress?
 - How many articles of amendment were sent to the states?
 - How many of the original articles of amendment are now part of the Constitution?
 - What rights are guaranteed by the 1st Amendment?
 - What do you consider to be the most important right in the Bill of Rights, and why?
 - Are there any rights in the Bill of Rights that you do not find to be important? Why?
 - What does it mean to "take the 5th?"
 - When did the Supreme Court begin to apply the Bill of Rights to the states?
 - What parts of the Bill of Rights have not been found to apply to the states?
 - What rights would you like to see protected in a constitutional amendment? Why?
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Social Studies/History Suggestion 5

Understand how the Constitution applies to students

Read the [Student Rights Topic Page](#). Then, answer the following questions:

- Describe "in loco parentis."
 - Do you agree that students should have fewer rights in school than outside of school? Explain.
 - Make an argument that t-shirts with obscene messages can be banned by a school. Make an argument that they cannot be banned.
 - Should student publications that criticize school officials be used in disciplinary actions against students? Why or why not? ³
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³ <http://www.usconstitution.net/constteach.html#soc>

Mathematics Suggestion

The Electoral College

Read [the Electoral College Topic Page](#). Using the [States Page](#) and the [Government Topic Page](#), answer the following questions:

- Note the number of electoral votes needed to win the Presidency.
 - Determine the minimum number of states that someone needs to win the Presidency.
 - Determine the maximum number of states that someone can win and still lose the Presidency (hint: see the answer to the above question).
 - Assume that Puerto Rico becomes a state before the next election. Using current census numbers, determine the number of electoral votes Puerto Rico would get.
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Geography Suggestion

Representation

Read [Government Topic Page](#). Using the [States Page](#), answer the following questions:

- Categorize the states into five categories based on population and color a United States map using a new color for each category. Do any trends emerge? Explain.
 - Note the populations of the states that gave their electoral vote to George Bush and to John Kerry in the 2004 election. Is there a correlation between population and how the state voted?
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English Suggestion

Usage quirks

Read [the Constitution](#). While doing so, answer the following questions:

- Note the use of British spellings in the original Constitution. Why were these spellings so prolific?
- Note any words that are capitalized in the text of the original Constitution. Is there a pattern to which words were capitalized? If so, what is it? ⁴

⁴ <http://www.usconstitution.net/constteach.html#soc>

